

## **Strategic Skills Initiative FAQ's**

### **General:**

- 1. Do all Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Directors in an Economic Growth Region (EGR) have to participate and sign a consortium agreement for the Strategic Skills Initiative?**

**Answer:** Yes, every WIB Director must participate and sign a consortium agreement. Any region that does not have participation from the WIB Director(s) will not be eligible for funding.

- 2. What is the role of and how do the IDWD Labor Market Analysts fit into this?**

**Answer:** IDWD Labor Market Analysts are currently doing leg work to prepare data packets and provide methodological guidance for the regions. However, once the Research and ID Phase starts, they will not be “loaned out” to do regional analysis as regions will need to use local staff or a consultant to institutionalize the knowledge and the processes of SSI.

- 3. How will Indiana Department of Workforce Development (IDWD) support Core Agents as the leaders of this initiative?**

**Answer:** IDWD is fully aware that the success of this initiative will depend, in large part, on the support that is given to the consortia. This support will be given in a number of different ways. First, IDWD will work with Core Agents to develop a consortium that is a full representation of their region. IDWD will then host workshops and webinars to assist consortia in report construction and to answer questions. In addition, IDWD has provided consortia with a comprehensive guide to primary and secondary data in the forms of the “SSI Data Packet” and the “SSI How-To-Handbook.”

- 4. Are Core Agents given the authority to effect change in their region?**

**Answer:** Although Core Agents will drive the initiative, no individual person will be given authority to effect change. As SSI is a regional effort, change will be effected in regions by the active participation of each consortium member bringing their perspective to the table to identify causes of occupation and skill shortages and implement solutions to alleviate these shortages. The consortium effects change.

**5. How should regional resources be (re)allocated for SSI?**

**Answer:** The requirement to reallocate or redirect resources includes both private and public resources. This, most likely, will look different for each region, but consideration needs to be given to these areas:

- Business and industry's expenditure of funds to contribute to the identified solutions.
- A modification of an existing public program or the creation of a new program targeted to address proposed solutions.
- Shifts in a workforce program's budget emphasis
- Resources provided by education institutions, service providers, organized labor, regional employers, and private sector organizations.

It is important to understand that the purpose of reallocating resources, particularly in the public sector, is to align workforce programs to create jobs and raise income. Everyone (the employers, the employees and the workforce programs) should benefit as resources are streamlined towards greater efficiency.

**6. Is there an example of a job description regarding a staff person who focuses on the initiative?**

**Answer:** There is no specific job description; instead it is the region's job to describe exactly who they are looking for to assist in the execution of this initiative. The regions' will need to assess their current strengths and weaknesses in the area and hire accordingly.

**Assembling Consortia:**

**7. Does IDWD wish to review the intended Consortia and Executive Team prior to its finalization and submission with the SSI Research and ID Grant application on August 5<sup>th</sup>?**

**Answer:** While it is not required, it is highly encouraged that regions will notify IDWD of Consortia and Executive Team members prior to their finalization in order to eliminate possible future conflicts.

**8. On Page 10 it notes that the Consortia should include "key . . . and service provider representatives." Is it allowable for service provider representatives to participate at this stage?**

**Answer:** Yes it is allowable, but it is not recommended for the early stages of report development (i.e. Shortage or Root Cause Report).

**9. Page 10 – Can the service providers truly be a part of the Executive Team?**

**Answer:** No

**10. Are Local Elected Officials appropriate to be on the Executive Team of the Consortia?**

**Answer:** If they are driving on a regional basis, then yes. If they are driving with the intent to benefit their local area, then no.

**11. What are the differences between the Consortia and the Executive Team. What are the roles of each?**

**Answer:** The Executive Team is 5-7 members that will be intimately involved in each step of the initiative. They will sign off on all grant requests and will be a part of all research and development of solutions. SSI is built around full regional involvement, so the consortia should include as many members as possible that will help guide the initiative to ensure that all the reports are truly in line with the region's needs.

**12. Can “executive teams” include 1-2 “sector” representatives?...or is that premature? Each would represent an “industry”, as referenced in the packet.**

**Answer:** Industry/sector/cluster reps would be acceptable. One word of caution is biasing a region's shortages before even identifying them...if a region has a sector rep and doesn't find shortages in their particular sector/industry, how likely are they to stay engaged? Will they force the region into identifying shortages in their particular sector industry?

**Research and ID Grant/Funding:**

**13. Do industries and/or clusters of industries need to be identified in the Research and ID Grant Application?**

**Answer:** No. The identification of industries and/or clusters of industries is the first step to be taken towards identifying occupation and skill shortages. Consortia will perform the research necessary to obtaining this data during, not prior to, the Research and ID Phase. A word of caution is offered against prematurely identifying sectors and industries based on previously conducted studies.

**14. Are the three documents on pages 43-45 what is needed to get grant money?**

**Answer:** The grant application should include the documents presented in the referenced pages plus a description describing the Consortia's plan using the criteria listed on page 42 as a guide, and the budget line item justification referenced on page 45.

**15. When can Core Agents/consortia begin accumulating costs to be reimbursed from the grant?**

**Answer:** Expenses incurred prior to Aug. 31, the date the grants will be issued, will be honored as long as they are allowable costs for SSI. To be reimbursed, include a line item on the Budget Request sheet for the Research and ID Grant for all money spent up to prior to Aug. 31.

**16. What are the expected procedures to be followed in procurement of services during the very short timeline? If the planned contractors and/or purchase of services vendors are named in the narrative, does that suffice, or do you expect full blown procurements?**

**Answer:** If the question is whether regions are allowed to suspend procurement regulations and just pick vendors and present them in the narrative, the answer should be no. DWD procurement regulations state that "grantees must receive prior approval from DWD for all services for \$10,000 or greater of DWD funds that are to be procured without competition (sole source)". This program should follow all grant management and administrative regulations. If expedited procurement of contract services is the issue here then it is a DWD policy question. It may be that regions are concerned about developing the budget and plan and having specific consultants identified. If this is the case, then:

- a. They have until August 5 to get the grant request prepared.
- b. If they intend to use consultants, they should follow the grant receiving organization's procurement policies to identify the vendors (with contingency clauses related to the funding received) in time to include them in the application.

**17. How do Cost Allocation Plans play a role in this initiative? Are the associated and allocated costs of space, phone, etc. expected to be allocated to this grant?**

**Answer:** As with the previous questions, we are not suspending any grant management or administrative regulations under this program. This is why the proper designation of the Consortium Entity is important. The entity designated by each consortium should have a proper cost allocation plan in place. In fact, the entity should be known to DWD and have a fairly clean recent compliance audit.

The Consortium Entity should charge to the grant all direct and indirect allocated costs in accordance with the entities cost allocation plan.

**18. Will there be an electronic version of the Research and ID phase grant application that we can use to fill out the forms, etc.? Also, that application calls for an Executive Summary and Work Statement respectively. Are there forms and/or formats to be used for that part of the application?**

**Answer:** There will be an electronic version of the applications on-line wherein you can populate those fields electronically. The executive summary and work statement are simply narratives explaining your region's approach.

**19. What is the process for the gaining and then administering of the funds representing 'solutions', beginning next March?**

**Answer:** Regions will submit their Solutions report on the 21<sup>st</sup> of Feb for each sector/industry in which you are seeking funding. They will then be reviewed and compared to the other regional reports. At the end of the day, the SSI team and report review committee will determine the amounts for each sector/industry, within each region, will receive requested amounts. Those monies will then be distributed to the legal entity in the region (i.e. the WIB's for the Rsrch & ID \$'s).

**20. It appears on the Solutions registrants and budget forms that solutions are WIA-based, so to speak. If 1 or more solution strategies are not relevant to that format, how should the solution and its costs be presented?**

**Answer:** If they are not "WIA" based then proper presentation and justification should be made to demonstrate the root cause associated with this solution and how the shortage will be addressed by this specific solution. View as though you are seeking seed funding from a venture capital firm. You want to make your request as clear, concise, and specific as possible. This does not necessarily equal length, but detail should be included as a means to justifying the Region's "line of sight" argument for that specific solution.

**Fiscal Agent:**

**21. Is Crowe Chizek the Fiscal Agent for just the planning grant, SSI or everything, meaning Regional Board and Service Provider responsibilities as well?**

**Answer:** The current contract is for Pre-Research and ID only.

**22. What is the role of Crowe Chizek as the Fiscal Agent and what are the services they will provide at any and all of those levels.**

**Answer:** The value that Crowe Chizek will add to this process is:

- c. Providing assistance to DWD with technical matters, such as grants management.
- d. Working through the mechanics of a single state fiscal agent in anticipation of such a need in the future. In the current case, the cost would be too high to take over all of the accounting functions for the consortia. The fiscal agent will work out the cost reporting and monitoring procedures with DWD well before the grants are issued. The fiscal agent will be disbursing funds to the consortia.

**Research and ID Phase:**

**23. How do you define a shortage?**

**Answer:** A specific occupation is in shortage at a specific point in time in a particular EGR if employers in that EGR find themselves able to recruit and/or retain fewer workers in that occupation than they would be willing to employ under circumstances and conditions prevailing in the EGR's labor market and workplaces. In other words, the word "shortage" refers to the excess of demand over supply under conditions as they exist or are expected to exist absent any interventions by the workforce development system that are not already programmed. Beyond that, to be of interest to SSI, a shortage occupation must meet three additional criteria:

- They must be "critical" to the growth and/or competitiveness of the region's key industry and/or clusters.
- They must represent strong employment demand and
- They must provide good earnings.

**24. To what degree must an occupation or skill shortage affect the entire region?**

**Answer:** Occupation and skill shortages could occur in only "pockets" of the region as long as they are in sectors or industries that drive the regional economy.

**Solutions and Implementation Phase:**

**25. Will Solutions and Implementation Phase funding be available for solutions which are not related to curriculum development or the direct training of workers? For example, will funds be available for career awareness if that is a root cause? Or to review compensation policies of hospitals to keep nurses, or to review and recommend improved work place policies?**

**Answer:** Yes, solutions will be developed based on the root causes of the shortages. If root causes are found to be something other than curriculum development or training, then the proposed solutions should address these. Funding will then be awarded for solutions that best solve the root causes of the shortages.

**26. What, specifically, can Solutions and Implementation funds be used for?**

**Answer:** A general answer is that funds can be used for any allowable activity provided under WIA law and regulations. That being said, keep in mind that Solution and Implementation funds will only be requested to fill the gap left after all other solutions and resources have been exhausted. Many costs, therefore, will not be included in the funding proposal, but rather funded through other sources. For example, Solution and Implementation funds can be requested to purchase equipment for training programs, however, a reviewer would search the proposal for what contribution is being made by the specific employers benefiting from the training.

**27. Why are incumbent workers not subject to performance measures while the adult, youth, and dislocated worker populations are? Can the state use its special authority or request waivers so that all populations are exempt from performance measures?**

**Answer:** The Act gives authority to the Governor to use discretionary funds to operate a state incumbent worker program not subject to performance measures. With that single exception, all registrants under our formula, rapid response, and Governor's discretionary (15%) funded programs are subject to performance measures. The state cannot request special authority or provide waivers to exempt these populations from performance measures.

**28. Can the Solutions and Implementation funds go directly to a hospital, high school, or wherever the training is going to occur?**

**Answer:** No. The grant recipient for all funds will be the consortium for each Economic Growth Region (EGR). The money will then be dispersed, by the consortium, to the parties involved in implementing the solutions.

**Timeline:**

**29. When do we expect to have the ERRIS job vacancy information?**

**Answer:** ERISS will begin the calling process for the job vacancy surveys during the week of June, 27, and the final information should be delivered to the regions on/or prior to Aug. 26.

